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Flynt Links Shooting to His Probe of Assassinations

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LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga. — Sara Hutchins, a part-time secretary in the Gwinnett County Surveyor's Office, took a phone call at 12:20 p.m. the day a sniper gunned down Hustler magazine owner Larry Flynt and his lawyer on a downtown sidewalk.

"Tell (Solicitor) Gary Davis he doesn't have to worry about Larry Flynt anymore," a male voice said. "Jesus has taken a hand in it."

It was lunch time, there had been a shooting down the street, and Hutchins was alone in the office. No one was in the office of the solicitor (county attorney), either, and she had run to answer the phone.

"The call upset her," said Gwinnett County Sheriff's Deputy Ralph McGee. He said Hutchins put the caller on "hold" and tried to find Davis' secretary. "By the time she found someone, the caller had hung up," McGee said.

Police have not been able to trace the call, but it is one of several leads on which they are working.

JUST A FEW BLOCKS AWAY from the county surveyor's office, an ambulance from Couch's Gwinnett County Ambulance Service was speeding Flynt, 35, and attorney Gene Reeves, 47, to the Button Gwinnett Hospital, both with massive stomach wounds. The sniper's bullets struck Flynt and Reeves as they walked back to the state court building, where the millionaire sex magazine owner was being tried on obscenity charges.

At least two shots rang out just before noon on Perry Street in downtown Lawrenceville, a city of about 7,000, 30 miles northeast of Atlanta.

Flynt, who had feared for his life for

months but did not take his bodyguards with him to Lawrenceville because he felt safe there, fell to the sidewalk.

FLYNT, NOW PARALYZED from the thighs down, has undergone three operations and now faces the possibility of a fourth, doctors at Emory Hospital in Atlanta reported yesterday. He is still listed in serious condition.

Dr. Tom Brock said Flynt's vital signs have remained stable, but that "because of the intra-abdominal infection and the threat of severe sepsis (blood infection), and the possible need for further surgery, his condition remains the same — serious."

Reeves remains at Button Gwinnett Hospital. He had been reported in satisfactory condition from his wounds, but it worsened Friday and doctors now list him in "guarded" condition.

Despite the time of day of the shooting, the location in the heart of a small city and the large number of people close at hand (there were an estimated 150 diners in the nearby V & J Cafeteria where Flynt and Reeves had just eaten), police have had a difficult time finding anyone who heard the shots or saw where they came from.

Suspicion has centered on an abandoned two-story apartment building about 25 yards across the street from the spot where Flynt and Reeves fell.

THE LACK OF WITNESSES when it would appear there should be many was just one of several puzzling aspects of the attack on the curly-haired Flynt, a one-time Kentucky farm boy who has amassed a fortune through sales of Hustler.

Investigators have yet to reveal the type of weapon used in the shootings or the hiding place they believe the shots were fired from. They have not said what they believe to be the motive.

But Flynt and his aides have made it clear they are convinced the attempt on his life was an effort to stop Flynt's investigation of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Flynt, who recently found religion with the help of President Carter's evangelist sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton, has offered a \$1 million reward for conclusive information about Kennedy's murder. The reward offer has been published in Flynt's Los Angeles Free Press, and major newspapers across the nation.

The official Soviet news agency Tass, in reporting the shooting of Flynt, implied that it was somehow connected with the assassination of Kennedy.

Al Goldstein, publisher of Screw, a New York-based sex magazine and a friend of Flynt, visited Flynt at the Lawrenceville hospital wearing a bullet-proof vest. He said he believed Flynt's assailant was a person who felt the sex magazine owner was ridiculing "born again" Christians.

FLYNT REFERS TO HIMSELF as a "born again" convert but has continued with his sex publications.

The day following the ambush, Flynt's wife, Althea, 24, revealed that 25 percent of the employees of Flynt's magazines — Hustler, Chic and Ohio magazine — had been fired about a week prior to the attempt on her husband's life. But Andrew Jaffe, a spokesman for Flynt, played down the possibility of any connection between the two events.

From the beginning, the attempt to find the sniper has been hampered by false starts. Police at first believed the shots were fired from a car and issued an alert for a 1974-75 silver Camaro. Hours later this lead was discarded.

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